



# PIONEER SQUARE

*Pioneer Square has evolved over the past one and one half centuries of Seattle's history. Formerly located on a peninsula of land surrounded by tidal flats, this was the location of Seattle's first downtown. The district's existing historic buildings were constructed in successive phases of development influenced by the need to rebuild after the Great Fire of 1889, followed by the Klondike Gold Rush era, railroad construction, World Wars I and II, and an era of automobiles and road construction beginning in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

Legal protections have preserved the architectural heritage of Pioneer Square's buildings. However, the neighborhood has also adapted to the present in its business and activity patterns. The Pioneer Square business district enjoys the anchoring presence of businesses that attract tourists and shoppers to books, furnishings, fine art, crafts, antiques and specialty clothing. Restaurants and nightclubs attract visitors even as the mix and popularity of these businesses change. Commercial and professional service employment in Pioneer Square has fluctuated with economic trends in the past twenty years. The current economic recession has hurt prospects for small businesses, and has caused several development projects to be stalled. The neighborhood also provides shelter and services to many low-income individuals.

The Pioneer Square Neighborhood Plan presents a multi-faceted vision that is supported by several Livable South Downtown Land Use recommendations. Key among the neighborhood's interests is preservation of historic character, growth of a significant residential population, future development that knits-together the neighborhood and investments in public spaces. Achieving development in the Qwest Field north parking lot is also a priority in the Pioneer Square Neighborhood Plan.



## EXISTING LAND USE CONTEXT

### Historic Review and Historic Protections

Land Use Code provisions combined with U.S. Secretary of the Interior *Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* and local Pioneer Square Preservation District Rules help protect the historic and cultural integrity of properties in Pioneer Square. In addition to the Federal designation, a local designation—the Pioneer Square Preservation District—encompasses a larger geographic area (see map on page 14). As a special review



district, an official Certificate of Approval from the Director of the Department of Neighborhoods, following a recommendation from the Pioneer Square Preservation Board, is required prior to the issuance of City permits for any Pioneer Square structure. Approvals are required for actions such as façade alterations, new construction, demolition or remodeling.

### Design and Use Patterns

Chapter 23.66 of the Land Use Code contains provisions governing special review districts. This section identifies preferred development patterns and character features of development in Pioneer Square including buildings developed to the property line, exterior materials that are consistent with the historic character of the district, and height incentives to encourage residential uses.

### Variable Height Limit

Existing provisions in the PSM 100 zone provide that no structure shall exceed by more than “15 feet the height of the tallest structure” within the block or on adjacent block frontages to a maximum of 100 feet. The provision has resulted in a patchwork of potential building heights, and is viewed by some as a complicating factor for new infill development.

### High Water Table

Much of Pioneer Square is located atop former tidelands. This fact complicates potential construction of underground structures and creates unique seismic and drainage control challenges that must be met through the engineering of each project.



Historic Tidelands



## OBJECTIVES FOR FUTURE LAND USE

1. Protect and preserve historic buildings and the historic character of the Pioneer Square neighborhood
2. Support the emergence of a significant residential community in Pioneer Square particularly for market rate and affordable workforce housing
3. Provide incentives for redevelopment of vacant and under-developed non-historic parcels
4. Encourage employment density near the transit hub of King Street Station
5. Facilitate redevelopment of the Qwest Field North Lot
6. Improve the pedestrian experience and quality of public spaces within and around Pioneer Square

## North Lot Land Use Code Amendments

DPD proposed changes to development standards for the Qwest Field north lot in early 2009 as Phase 1 of the Livable South Downtown legislative process. The standards allow heights up to 240 feet under specific conditions, subject to review by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board.

Other amendments as part of that legislation apply more generally to Pioneer Square. Among other minor changes, the amendments would also prohibit new principal use parking garages for long-term (commuter) parking. Garages for short-term parking that serve area businesses would continue to be allowed through a special review process.

## Proposed Zoning and Land Use Code Amendments

### Protecting Historic Character

One hundred twenty six buildings in Pioneer Square have been identified as contributing to the historic or architectural character of the National Register Historic District. Preserving these buildings is a principle objective in the Pioneer Square Neighborhood Plan. The community has emphasized throughout the Livable South Downtown planning process that Land Use Code changes should 1) encourage upgrades or rehabilitation of historic buildings, 2) retain a scale of future development that complements historic structures in sub-areas within the district and 3) discourage demolition of historic structures. In the past, property owners have argued that existing historic buildings are not economically viable and therefore should be demolished in order to provide opportunities for partial or whole-sale redevelopment.

To support these historic preservation objectives, the following land use strategies are recommended:

- Retain review by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board. In addition, a new section, 23.66.032, would codify the process by which the Pioneer Square Preservation Board identifies properties that “contribute” to the architectural or historic character of the Pioneer Square Preservation District, based on criteria that are identified in the Land Use Code. Criteria include the National





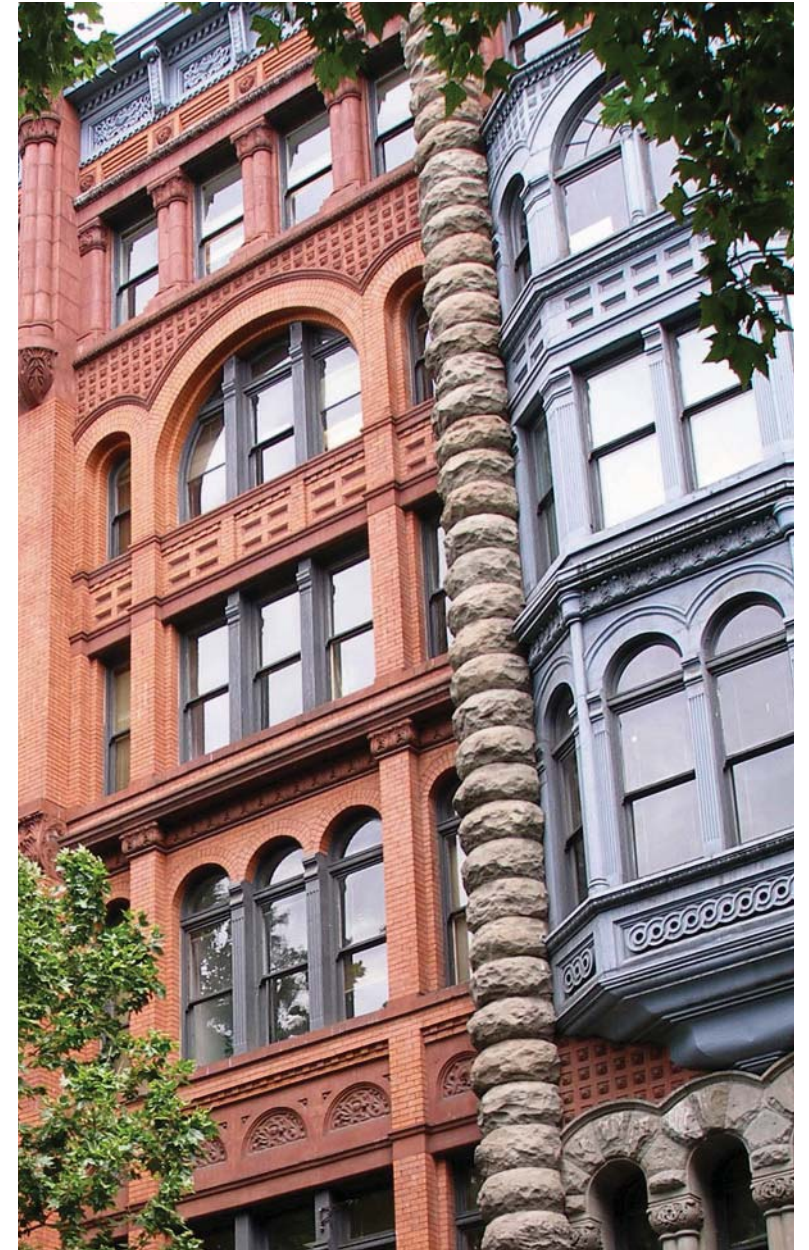
Register of Historic Places category of resources that are “contributing” to the Pioneer Square-Skid Road Historic District, which is a federal designation.

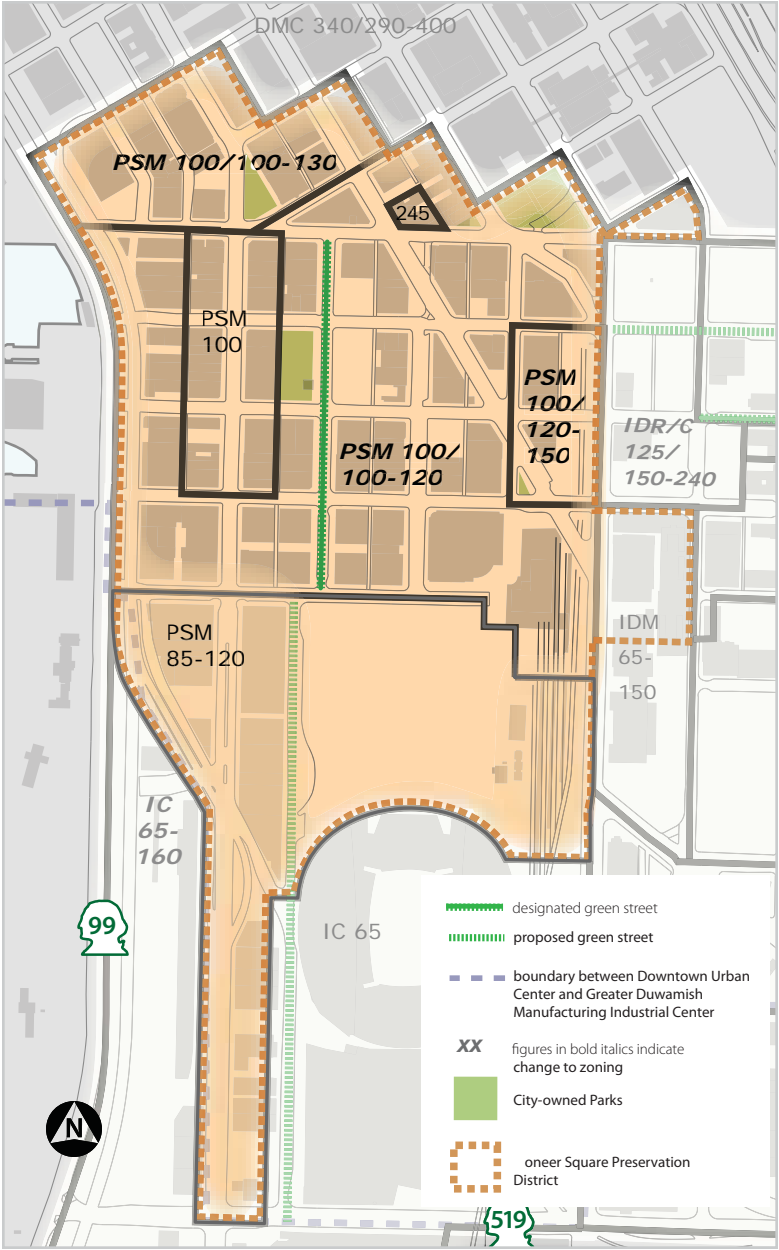
- Retain existing base development capacity throughout Pioneer Square, identified in the area north of S. King Street as building heights of 100 feet, and prohibit higher heights in the central historic retail area along First Avenue South.
- Provide an option for buildings to exceed base heights through incentive zoning so long as the development does not result in the demolition or removal of any contributing structure.
- Establish South Downtown Historic Transfer of Development Rights (TDR, commercial floor area) and Transfer of Development Potential (TDP, residential floor area) programs to provide the opportunity for owners of contributing properties to sell up to 3 FAR of development capacity for use on eligible lots, contingent upon building restoration or maintenance of the contributing feature on the lot. For a complete description of the proposed TDR and TDP programs, see page 86 of this report.

### Promoting Residential Uses & Infill Development

A key objective of the Pioneer Square Neighborhood Plan is “a diverse community with a significant residential population.” The neighborhood plan identifies “targeted sites in Pioneer Square,” including future new construction on vacant parcels. Proposed Land Use Code amendments would:

- Allow higher heights outside the central historic area at the edges of Pioneer Square north of Yesler Way, East of 2nd Avenue S., and south of S. King Streets for buildings in residential use.
- Implement a residential incentive zoning program. The program will provide developers with an option to construct buildings to an identified “maximum” height through construction of, or contribution toward, affordable workforce housing.





### Proposed Heights and Development Standards

The Pioneer Square Neighborhood Plan identifies the need to encourage infill development on vacant, non-historic properties. The community has indicated that zoned building heights should respond to the character of the surrounding neighborhood. The map to the left identifies recommended building heights in Pioneer Square.

Along 1st Avenue S. between Yesler Way and S. Jackson Street,

- Limit maximum height to 100 feet. This area features the greatest concentration of historic buildings in Pioneer Square, all of which are less than 100 feet in height.

North of S. King Street the following is recommended:

- Three height zones with the following maximum height limits for buildings with residential uses through participation in the incentive zoning program:
  - 120 feet in central areas of Pioneer Square;
  - 130 feet north of James Street near the downtown core; and
  - 150 feet east of Second Avenue S. Extension.
- Maximum height for buildings in non residential uses: 100 feet. For development above the base height, bonus floor area may be developed only in residential use through participation in the incentive zoning program.

- No development may result in the demolition or removal of any historic building or structure.
- Replace the variable height limit with a provision to require a 15 foot building setback above 100 feet along street frontages in central Pioneer Square. This standard was suggested by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board to ensure lower façade heights compatible with the scale of buildings surrounding Occidental Park. The setback requirement may be waived by the Department of Neighborhoods Director upon recommendation of the Pioneer Square Preservation Board.
- A building may be developed above the base height limit only on lots at least 7,200 square feet in size. Existing City code requires “fire separation” between windows and nearby structures. Buildings on larger lots are able to provide that separation along property lines rather than create blank walls along lot lines.

South of S. King Street

- Retain the existing PSM 85-120 zoning as amended for the Qwest Field North Lot that was recently approved.



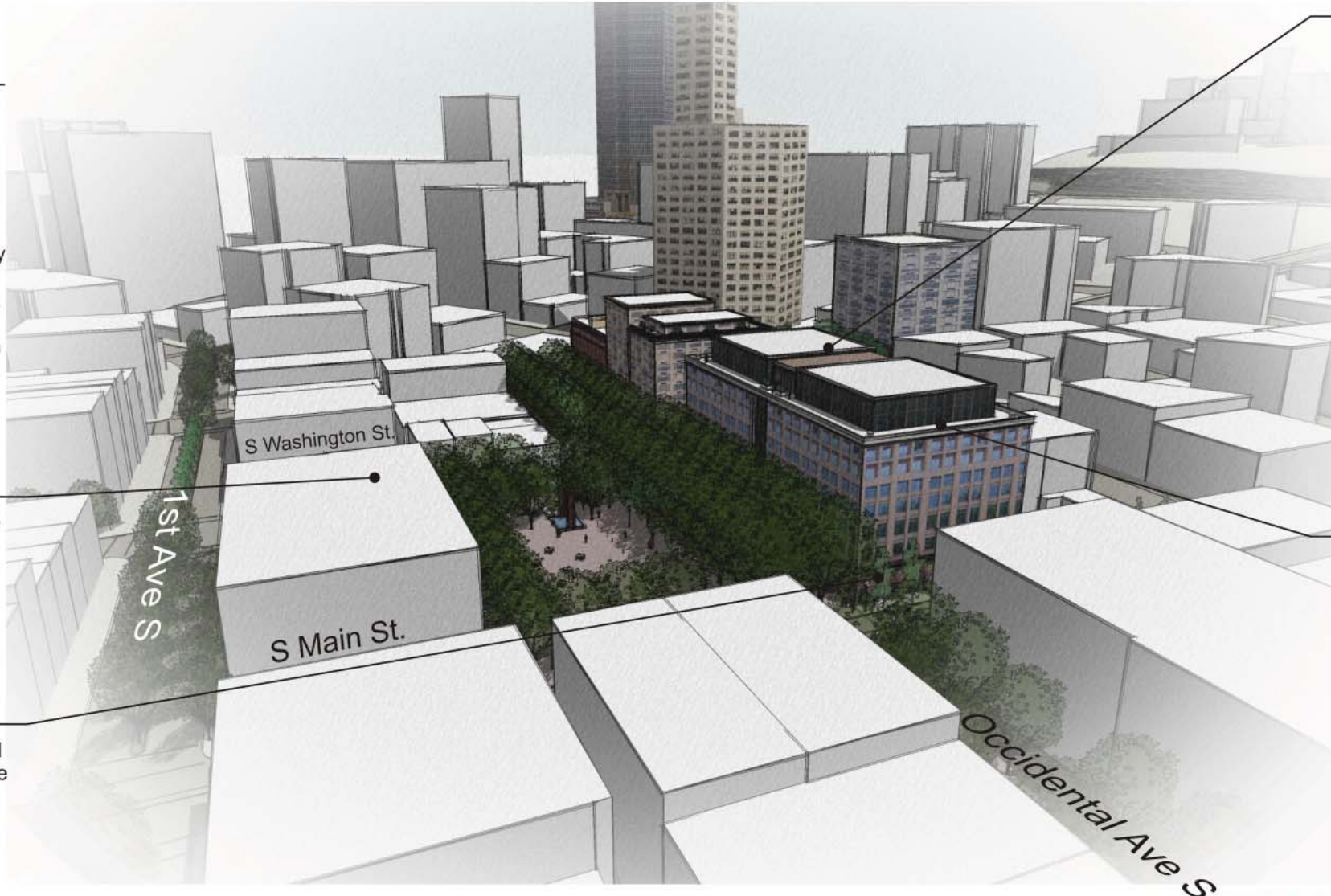
# Pioneer Square - aerial view

Development projects are reviewed to ensure preservation and rehabilitation of historic- and architectural features

New buildings generally constructed to the property line consistent with the existing Pioneer Square pattern of development

South Downtown Historic TDR to provide resources for rehabilitation of historic buildings

Retail and other preferred uses required at street-level to provide pedestrian activity and interest



Heights up to 120 feet with a setback at 100 feet in central Pioneer Square for buildings with residential units (100 feet maximum currently)

Building height above 100 feet gained through participation in incentive zoning programs

Building set-back required at 100 feet in central Pioneer Square to minimize shadow impacts on Occidental Park; this standard may be waived by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board

*This depiction is presented for illustration purposes only. White structures depict existing buildings*







The building depicted on the right in this graphic is currently a surface parking lot.

Pioneer Square - Occidental Park - eye-level view



*This depiction is presented for illustration purposes only.*





Proposed Amendments to the Pioneer Square Sign Code

Amendments to sign regulations were requested by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board. The ordinance would add a subsection that addresses surface parking lot signage in the same manner as currently used in the International District, allowing for a limited presence of signs that indicate the location of parking entrances/exits and whether parking spaces are for public or private use. Other edits improve the clarity and consistency of the sign regulations. For example flags and banners are identified as categories of signs addressed by existing regulations.

Summary of Base and Maximum Development Potential  
Pioneer Square

Zone/ Category	Base Height	Maximum Height On properties greater than 7,500 square feet.
PSM 100 (First Ave S. Corridor)	100 feet for all uses	
PSM 100-120 (central Pioneer Square)	100 feet for all uses	Up to 120 feet Residential floor area must be at least equivalent to the total floor area above 100 feet.  Setback provisions apply above 100 feet
PSM 100 -130 (north of James Street)	100 feet for all uses	Up to 130 feet Residential floor area must be at least equivalent to the total floor area above 100 feet.
PSM 85-120 ( retain existing zoning west of Occidental Avenue S. and south of S. King Street)	85 feet for all uses	Up to 120 feet Retain provision that requires 75% of the building to be in residential use for buildings greater than 85 feet in height.
PSM 100-150	100 feet for all uses	Residential floor area must be at least equivalent to the total floor area above 100 feet.